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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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†"Little Darling" opened Tuesday, October 27th, at the Biltmore Theatre.
†"Rosalinda" opened Wednesday, October 28th, at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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"Rosalinda"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 29, 1942

Streamlined Strauss

By HOWARD BARNES

MAX REINHARDT'S version of the celebrated Johann Strauss operetta, "Die Fledermaus," has opened at the Forty-fourth Street Theater. Under the streamlined title of "Rosalinda" it makes a big bid for theatrical excitement. It is still the Strauss music which makes it a gala inaugural for the second season of the New Opera Company. The great Viennese waltzes of the work, culminating in that superb second act finale, are the touchstone of this revival. Since they are ornamented with brilliant ballet numbers, "Die Fledermaus," or "Rosalinda," is still an elegant show.

• • •

From the dramatic standpoint, it is difficult to see how Reinhardt has contributed any important ministrations to the classic. The principals, to be sure, talk and sing in comparatively colloquial language, which has been translated into English. The catch is that the English in this Lodewick Vroom presentation is not much easier to understand than a foreign tongue. There is a lot of action on the stage, but it is not very dramatically convincing unless it involves those high moments of Act II. Since the acting is rarely fluent or persuasive, "Rosalinda" remains very much "Die Fledermaus."

• • •

Being a push-over for the Strauss score, that is quite all right with me. When an entire company tosses the melodies of the bright carnival around the stage and the ballet swirls through meticulous rhythms, "Rosalinda" is very good entertainment indeed. The libretto still strikes me as obvious and stuffy. Oscar Karlweis, as Prince Orlofsky, contrives a few moments of beguiling comedy in the ballroom scenes. On the whole, the performers stick to their singing, or muddle through some stuffy stage direction.

• • •

It is not my province to analyze the singing or the orchestral accompaniment in the production. Mr. Thomson has taken care of those matters in an adjoining piece. Let me say, though, that the orchestra, under Erich Wolfgang Korngold's direction, appeared to rise to every demand of the script and the score. As for the playing, Ralph Herbert did a remarkable job with the part of von Eisenstein on a moment's notice last night; Virginia MacWatters was properly coy as Adele and so was Dorothy Sarnoff in the title role.

• • •

Operetta acting has never appealed especially to me. Perhaps fine acting can be coupled with fine singing, but the D'Oyly Carte Company is the only troupe that ever convinced me of that fact. On the other hand, the ballet, and particularly two charming dancers called Phyllis and Joyce Hill, added real theatrical effectiveness to the proceedings. Their costumes, incidentally, are something for the book. "Rosalinda" is a gay and lilting revival of a famous operetta. It is not much as theater, even with the Reinhardt streamlining.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 29, 1942

Biedermeier Jitterbugging

By VIRGIL THOMSON

MUSICALLY, "Rosalinda" was passable. Erich Korngold conducted in real Viennese vein, with flexibility and much graceful expression. Everett West, the tenor of the cast, did the best singing; and most agreeable it was. Dorothy Sarnoff has a big and impressive soprano voice. At the beginning her vocalization was quite fine. Later she got to shouting a bit, as people will do in light opera. And if she has not much training as an actress, she is nevertheless a very beautiful woman, which is none to her disadvantage as a stage personality. Virginia MacWatters, who sang the ladies' maid, was distinctly amateurish both in voice and in dramatic presentation. So was everybody else, with the exception of Oscar Karlweis, who, although he can hardly sing at all, is obviously a professional actor with a real technique. His performance was distinguished and convincing.

• • •

I do not mean to say that the cast as a whole was vocally untrained. They have all had certainly lots of voice lessons and some singing experience. Almost any of them would have been acceptable if surrounded by more secure artists. Surrounded only by one another, they gave the effect of being all not quite ripe for Broadway appearance in so difficult a style of musical theater as the operetta. I imagine that if a firmer stage director had been able to keep the singers from wiggling all the time, their vocal virtues would have shone more brightly. It is hard enough to sing in the florid style standing still, as is the basic routine of grand opera. To do it well while running around and smiling at the audience is too much to ask of artists who have had little training available to them in this special tradition. Consequently, until the ballet appeared, the stage both looked and sounded amateurish beside the superb control and rhythmic power of Mr. Korngold's orchestra.

• • •

With the appearance of the ballet troupe, directed by William Dollar, at the end of the second act, everything fell into the groove. The dancers themselves had style and knew what they were doing. The big waltz was choreographically charming and professional to the last detail. If the rest of the performance had had that kind of firmness it would have been worthy of Strauss's great score and might have made us forget, even, the utter silliness of the book. As it was, in spite of distinguished staging collaboration and superb musical direction, a gifted but undisciplined cast failed to make jell a work that was distinctly beyond their present professional powers. Let me add in their defense that I have seen this work foil the best attempts of many an all-star cast to make real theater out of it.

'ROSALINDA'

'Max Reinhardt version of "Die Fledermaus," in three acts; music by Johann Strauss; American adaptation by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan Jr.; Lyrics by Paul Kerby; dances by George Balanchine; settings by Oliver Smith; stage direction by Felix Brentano; costumes by Ladislas Czettel; presented, as an offering of the New Opera Company, by Lodewick Vroom at the Forty-fourth Street Theater on October 28, 1942. The cast:

Alfredo Allevanto	Everett West
Gabriel von Eisenstein	Ralph Herbert
Adele	Virginia MacWatters
Rosalinda von Eisenstein	Dorothy Sarnoff
Blint	Leonard Stocker
Falke	Gene Barry
Dr. Frank	Paul West
Fifi	Shelly Winter
Prince Orlofsky	Oscar Karlweis
Aide-de-Camp	Edwin Fowler
Frosch	Louis Sorin
Premier Dancer	Jose Limon
Premiere Danseuse	Mary Ellen

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 29, 1942

"Rosalinda" Is Handsomely Staged, Well Sung, in 44th Street

"Rosalinda," operetta with music by Johann Strauss. Libretto version by Max Reinhardt, adapted by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan Jr. Produced by Lodewick Vroom for the New Opera Company at the 44th St. Theatre, New York, Oct. 28, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

IF THE generous Mrs. Lytle Hull and the New Opera Company do not have another good time all season they will be able to think back upon their production of "Rosalinda" at the 44th St. Theatre last night with a fine burst of satisfying pride.

Their production of Max Reinhardt's version of "Die Fledermaus" was handsomely accomplished, particularly in the matter of ensemble. The stage and the singers were most attractively dressed, the music was inspiringly played under the direction of Dr. Erich Wolfgang Korngold and the solo voices were excellent.

It happens that this has turned out to be a kind of combination tribute to new American talent and a sprinkling of refugee art.

The two Reinhardts, father and son, are represented by the version used; Dr. Korngold, famed in Europe as a Strauss authority, and for some years a resident of Hollywood, where he has composed many outstanding musical scores for the films, was in charge of the orchestra, and Oscar Karlweis, formerly of Berlin and Vienna, sang the role of Prince Orlofsky.

Americans Good

Representing American talent Dorothy Sarnoff was a charming Countess; Virginia MacWatters, a popular Philadelphian, was the maid, Adele; Everett West, hailing from Chicago, was the Alfred, and a large and handsome chorus has been recruited from musical institutions close to home.

The result is gratifying. Naturally, if the producers' object had been one of reviving an amusing entertainment and nothing more they could have found the adaptation of "Die Fledermaus" Lawrence Langner made in 1933, with lyrics by Robert A. Simon and a production sponsored by Dwight Deere Wiman. That was probably the best version of the Strauss opera that has ever been sung in America. Peggy Wood and Helen Ford, George Meader and Joseph Macauley had great fun with it as "Champagne Sec" for many weeks at the Morosco.

But the present producers preferred to go back to the original and make their own adaptation. George Marion Jr. started one, but was called away to finish up "Beat the Band." Young Reinhardt and John Meehan Jr. took over the job.

Added Fun

The new book is serviceable, but not brilliant. The boys have added a pinch here and a pinch there, with Adele the victim, and introduce a modest disrobing number, a sort of striptease of the '90s, which Miss Sarnoff delivers amusingly.

The comedy falls to singers rather than comedians, but Ralph Herbert, called in at the last minute to substitute for Ernest MacChesney, who is ailing, and Oscar Karlweis, who sang Orlofsky during the Berlin run, do well with the roles of Von Eisenstein and the Prince. The lyrics, by Paul Kerby, I suspect, read well.

The story of the philandering gentleman who gets his wife and maid mixed up at a ball has always been pretty soggy. It was soggy as "A Wonderful Night," and again as "The Merry Countess." Once it was called "Night Birds," but that didn't help either.

But the difference between the older productions and this one is that they were staged for "gags" and "Rosalinda" has been staged for the score. It is with the score and the singing that "Rosalinda" will score its happiest success.

There would have been many encores if Dr. Korngold had not wisely decided to permit none. Miss Sarnoff and Miss MacWatters were both popular with the audience, and sang their first and second act numbers beautifully. The ensemble items were nicely sung, and also popular. The George Balanchine dances were spirited and eye-filling.

The audience was large, modestly dressy, as befits wartime, and justly pleased with itself and its favorite opera organization.

"Rosalinda"

NEW YORK SUN
October 29, 1942

'Rosalinda,' a Modernized 'Fledermaus,' Is Offered At the 44th Street

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

EVERY so often some one remembers the charming score Johann Strauss wrote for "Die Fledermaus" and decides to revive that now rather ancient operetta. And usually this daring entrepreneur is later dug out, somewhat battered, from beneath a great heap of book and goes off shaking his head sadly. With this past in mind, it is doubly pleasant to report that "Rosalinda," which was presented last evening at the 44th Street, is by way of being a musical lark.

"Rosalinda" is, to be sure, "Die Fledermaus." The Max Reinhardt version has been adapted by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan, Jr. The lyrics have been brightened up sufficiently by Paul Kerby. But at bottom "Rosalinda" is "Die Fledermaus," with maids going to balls in masquerade, husbands failing to recognize masked wives, tenors being arrested in place of their betters and everybody turning up dizzily in the last act in jail. Count this as something the Strauss score still has to carry on its back; count also the fact that the humor is not often very humorous and regret that all of the singers do not always make all of Mr. Kerby's lyrics comprehensible.

Discount all this and still prepare to enjoy "Rosalinda." For all concerned have conspired to make this production bright and fresh and insouciant. Without burlesquing their story, they toss it about lightly. They go in gay colors against harmonious backgrounds; they play and sing it, not as if it were something old to be handled gingerly, but as if it were a new theatrical delight. Approached in this fashion, most of it is theatrical delight.

I am told by those who know that not all the singing is all it might be, but ears tuned to the pretty singers of Broadway do not grow hypercritical. The singing sounded fine to me and it was pleasant to find so many people who sounded, but did not look, like singers. Miss Dorothy Sarnoff and Miss Virginia MacWatters, for example, are evidently singers and have appeared in opera. You would never guess it to look at either of them. And a good many of the people who sing—including Everett West and Ralph Herbert (substituting on short notice for Ernest McChesney, and doing it very well) and Oscar Karlweis—also act with cheerful skill. There are skimming dances arranged by George Balanchine, and the chorus sings beautifully.

All of this floats on the Strauss score, of course, and floats to waltz tempo. The lilt obviously begins in the music, but they have arranged that it shall not end there. The whole affair manages, from first to last, to maintain a theatrical as well as a musical lilt. Erich Wolfgang Korngold, conducting, not only does what is evidently an admirable job with his good-sized orchestra, but manages to look very amusing while about it. Everything goes off with a kind of jauntiness. "Rosalinda" is a pleasant surprise all around. "Fledermaus" or no "Fledermaus."

NEW YORK POST
October 29, 1942

"Rosalinda" Presented By New Opera Company

By JOHN BRIGGS

I AM indebted to the New Opera Company for a most pleasant evening in the theatre, namely, the production of Johann Strauss' "Fledermaus" at the 44th St. Theatre, with which that company last night commenced its doings of the 1942-43 season. That is, it was what was left of "Fledermaus" after it had been restaged by Max Reinhardt, touched up musically here and there by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, and done into contemporary and sometimes slangy American by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan, Jr., with lyrics by Paul Kerby of the New Opera Company.

This is not to intimate that the evening was anything less than entertainment of the very first order. With an experienced Viennese conductor like Mr. Korngold in the pit, "Fledermaus," or "Rosalinda," as it is called in its New Opera Company metamorphosis, is as nearly fool-proof as an opera can be. Were I an impresario, I should infallibly put my shirt on such a production. The New Opera people evidently feel the same way, as it is planned for "Rosalinda" to run at the 44th St. concurrently with other offerings which are expected to make up in artistic import for any shortcomings at the box office.

Last evening's laurels, in your reporter's opinion, should go to Mr. Korngold, who conducted; Ralph Herbert, who replaced the indisposed Ernest McChesney as Eisenstein and did an excellent job on very short notice; and Oscar Karlweis, whose characterization of Prince Orlofsky is a bit of superb clowning. Virginia MacWatters, who sang Adele, owns a coloratura voice of exquisite purity and stopped the show with "My Lord Marquis," but for the most part her voice seemed a bit light for operatic singing. That is true also of Everett West, last night's Alfredo. On the other hand, Dorothy Sarnoff, who sang the title role, has a rich, robust voice at present hampered (to resort to a bit of professional jargon) by tension and bad placement.

Competent in minor roles were Leonard Stocker, Gene Barry, Paul West, Shelly Winter, Edwin Fowler and Louis Sorin.

But . . .

As Mr. Herbert's chief endowment is his great personal charm rather than his vocal prowess, I wondered why to him were allotted the seraphic measures of "Brother Mine and Sister Mine" in the second act. Is this not generally Falke's big moment? And why the Prologue, since everything is fully explained in Act I? What happened to Orlofsky's classic line, "Passe-moi un parapluie"? And why did Stage Director Brentano deem it necessary to have everyone stop and gather around Miss MacWatters, listening to her trill in the "Marquis" aria after the manner of Ben Yost's Varsity Eight?

Such fogeyish carpings aside, though, "Rosalinda" is superior entertainment. Time and repeated hearings cannot dull the champagne-like effect of Strauss' score, which is to the musician what follies shows are to the tired business man; and you may be sure that your reporter will be found in the 44th St. Theatre as often as his nights off permit.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 29, 1942

Max Reinhardt Version Of The Bat Presented By New Opera Company

By ROBERT BAGAR

THE waltz goes on. The gay, lilting measures of the Viennese waltz, the Johann Strauss waltz, are as fresh and young and beautifully abandoned as ever. So are the tart and tangy rhythms of other Straussian pages, so are those pure, joyful melodies that fairly leaped out of the composer's nimble imagination.

All of which is by way of introduction to an unalterable fact: Rosalinda, formerly The Bat, formerly Die Fledermaus, took an opening night audience by storm. And it is good and comforting and ever so right that it did.

This Rosalinda has its roots in what was a sensationally successful version of the Strauss original, made by Max Reinhardt. It was one of the pieces directly responsible for a great resurgence of Strauss operetta throughout Europe—and points around the compass—a little more than a decade ago.

* * *

In the Vernacular

Given in a thoroughly workmanlike vernacular adaptation, one that didn't mind parading an occasional cliche or, perhaps, a corny line, the work teemed with color and action and spirited life. It was most intelligently staged, handsomely costumed and it boasted likeable, as well as serviceable sets.

The second act became a mounting climax of swirling figures and shrewd groupings that caught the vixenish and mercurial moods of the music. Here, too, George Balanchine's adroit choreography was a balletic counterpoint to the main lines of the action. The whole of this scene was a perfect fusion of song and dance and visual excitement.

A good deal of the music heard last night does not belong strictly to the Fledermaus score. It was cleverly used in recitatives, dialogues, and the like. In short, the idea seemed to be music, music, music. And often only the piano in the pit undercored the on-stage business with provocative fragments of the Viennese waltz king's writings. There was time for comedy, there was time for cynicism, there was time for everything that the free-flowing plot had to offer, but all the time was time for music.

* * *

The Performers

One of the piece's charms was its atmosphere of co-operation. The players, a company of highly gifted ones, labored for a common cause. It was made forcefully apparent by the selfless attitude of some of them when golden opportunities to bask in the applause came along.

Special words of praise go to the performance turned in by Ralph Herbert, who replaced the indisposed Ernest McChesney almost at the last minute. But for a slip or two, minor ones, you can be sure, he took the part and gave it the well-known works in sympathy and understanding and all-around ability.

Oscar Karlweis had much to contribute in the way of acting and general stage deportment. He is a subtle, many-sided actor, capable of conveying worlds of expression with economy of gesture. Dorothy Sarnoff, a lovely soprano, sang her music fascinatingly and Virginia MacWatters, also lovely, also soprano —though lighter than Miss Sarnoff in voice quality—was completely captivating with her bird-like movements and pert little airs. Everett West, a talented tenor; Gene Barry, a talented baritone, and Paul West, an expert singing comic, were also to be commended. In fact, mark down the whole cast as one of many virtues and principally that of willingness.

* * *

Mr. Korngold

Mr. Korngold's conducting—and piano playing—had no loopholes. He knows the old Vienna, he knows Strauss and all of that was reflected in his work. The orchestra played excellently.

Mr. Vroom and the New Opera Company are to be deeply thanked for giving us this splendid production with its humors and manners of another era. If the present times warrant escapism in the theater, one can think of no lovelier or fuller measure of it than to spend an evening with Rosalinda and Johann Strauss.

"Rosalinda"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 29, 1942

Another Reunion In Old Vienna

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN A WORLD where there is no accounting for taste, there are people who find Mozart tinkly and Mickey Mouse dull, people who dislike dogs and never laugh at Beatrice Lillie. But the music of Johann Strauss is one of the very few things that seem to give everybody—young and old, lowbrow and highbrow—pleasure. Beyond their own grace and melodiousness, the Strauss waltzes have all the pathos of distance, conjuring up Vienna, that "rose-red city, half as old as time," at its gayest and most romantic.

For the sake of that music, one can put up with a great deal—even with the dreary caperings and hoary folderol of the first and last acts of *Die Fledermaus*, which the New Opera Company presented last night under the happier title of *Rosalinda*. They are using the Max Reinhardt version in an English translation, but it is no armor against the usual fate of comic librettos; the plot remains an obtrusion, and the jokes, too, seem half as old as time. Though the acting is in the best *Fledermaus* tradition, it is nonetheless full of skittish sallies and salamanderish prancing; and there are times when, despite Oliver Smith's gay sets, one is far happier if one hears *Rosalinda* with one's eyes closed.

* * *

Though much lovely Strauss music keeps breaking in upon the dreariness, it is only in its second act that *Rosalinda* comes glowingly to life, and much of it last night was delightful. Not only was Prince Orlofsky's ball brilliant with color and movement, but as the Prince, Oscar Karlweis gave the one good comedy performance, full of wit and style, of the evening. There is very little in operetta more charming and spirited, reflecting both the warmth and gayety of old Vienna, than the second-act finale. The music is irresistible; but it seemed to me that though George Balanchine's dances foamed out into effective full-stage waltz patterns, they lacked some of the delicacy and grace that one has come to expect of him.

* * *

Erich Korngold's conducting had a good deal of Viennese warmness and grace, though not quite all its speed and zip. In the title role, Dorothy Sarnoff, who is attractive to look at, sang very well, while Virginia MacWaters, as Adele, was equally good, managing her coloratura passages effortlessly. The male singers were not up to the female, though Everett West gave a pleasant account of himself, and Oscar Karlweis, for a gentleman who has no voice at all, did nobly.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
October 29, 1942

New Opera Company Presents 3rd U. S. Version of Strauss' 'Die Fledermaus'

By JOHN ANDERSON

IN THE frequent revival of Johann Strauss's famous operetta we may discover the theory that if you build a better "Fledermaus"-trap than your neighbor the world will beat a path to your door. At the Forty-fourth Street Theatre last night, where Mr. Vroom presented the New Opera Company's production, they were calling it "Rosalinda."

Eight or so seasons ago Mr. Langner and Mr. Wiman fixed it up as "Champagne, Sec," and before that the Shuberts described it simply enough as "One Wonderful Night." Call it by any name, it sounds as sweet in the music department and as silly in the libretto. Its score is full of the lilting magic of the waltz-master; its book is hopeless nitwit that was considered insane in Vienna on its first production in 1874. The trouble is there's no way of opening your ears to the songs without letting the story creep in at the same time. It's quite a problem.

Excellent Voices

Realizing that fact, the New Opera Company has emphasized the singing by assembling some excellent voices, but the acting makes the story seem worse, if possible, than ever. Only in the suave and deftly comic performance of Oscar Karlweis, as Prince Orlofsky, does the acting seem any nearer Vienna than approximately the south side of 44th st.

Presumably all these revivals of "Die Fledermaus" stem from Reinhardt's enormously popular production in Berlin in 1929, and this is an American adaptation of the Reinhardt version. The Little Wizard of once happier days at Schloss Leopoldskron was in the audience last night giving it the benediction of his applause.

His celebrated musical collaborator, Erich Korngold, was in the orchestra pit to add the brilliance of superb playing to the Strauss score, and the singers responded nobly to his leadership, especially in the second act climax of swooning sound. At such moments it is possible to forget even the book.

Beautiful Dances

But elsewhere it seems insistently dull, bound hand, foot and funnybone to a foolish story of how a faithless husband and his flirtatious wife attended the same party in disguise on an evening when the gentleman was supposed to be in jail for hitting his wife's pet tenor.

Besides the singing, the production does provide some pretty pleasures for the eye. Mr. Czettel's costumes are handsome and lavish, and Mr. Balanchine's dances, done by dancers from the American School of the Ballet, are beautifully designed and executed.

If someone would invent an ear sieve to strain off a bad libretto from a lovely score, all would be well. Until then, I can only envy lovers of "Fledermaus" and regret my own belief that man, who can make such music, should also make a little sense.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 29, 1942

MUSIC IN REVIEW
"Rosalinda"

By OLIN DOWNES

A PERFORMANCE of much prevailing liveliness and excellence of Johann Strauss's "Fledermaus"—under the title of "Rosalinda"—was given by the New Opera Company last night in the Forty-fourth Street Theatre. The opera was sung in English, in an Americanized translation of the Reinhardt version first heard in the Twenties, with huge success, in Berlin, and Mr. Reinhardt had taken a hand in the production.

The audience greatly enjoyed the piece. Enough of the English was understood for the jokes and the situations to drive home. The score captivated the ear, as it always does. It is music of which it could be said that, like Shakespeare, it is full of quotations. It never stales.

There are several fine, fresh voices in the cast, and there was some first-class singing. The supper scene and ballet of the second act, a crescendo of gayety and élan, with some new and delightful choreography by George Balanchine, was an experience that made one regret the fall of the curtain and wish that the moment might linger.

Ralph Herbert in Cast

A principal change in the cast was that of Ralph Herbert, who took the part of Eisenstein at short notice, replacing Ernest McChesney, suddenly taken ill. The part of Orlofsky, traditionally taken by a contralto in tights, was given a man. He was Oscar Karlweis, who had so appeared in the Reinhardt Berlin production. He was not called upon to sing very much, which, vocally speaking, was fortunate, but he is a born comedian, and his comedy is not of the banal or mugging kind. He was genuinely funny; his German accent and his comic business were really amusing.

The greatest voice in the cast was that of Dorothy Sarnoff. It is an exceptional organ, full and rich throughout its compass, brilliantly effective in the upper register, when it is not forced, which occurred occasionally, and Miss Sarnoff has marked dramatic talent. She will be heard in opera, and not only of the operetta type. She won recognition in the Metropolitan audition of the air last Winter.

Then here was Miss MacWaters, the Adele, who further pointed up the occasion by her fresh voice and brilliant coloratura, and her aptitude for comedy. Shelly Winter, the Fifi, was, vocally speaking, the most distinguished stylist of the evening. Her air in the second act was one of the occasions when applause momentarily held up the show. Mr. Herbert's Eisenstein was very creditable under the handicaps of preparation which have been noted, on broad comedy lines, though he put overmuch strain on his voice. Mr. West's tone production is pinched, but he enunciated well, the cast in general was excellently coordinated and there was some capital fooling.

Book Loses Original Flavor

The book has of course lost most of its original flavor, which is less jazzy than last night's specimen, pepped up, presumably, to the newer standards. Erich Korngold, who conducted, made additions to the music from other Strauss scores, as the interpolation of the "Vienna Woods" waltz at the beginning of the first act; the duet which accompanied the pleasing scene of Rosalinda's changing of costumes in Act 2, which comes from a little known Strauss operetta, "Knight Pazman"; the addition to the ballet scene, and a most appropriate one, of the waltz, "Wine, Woman and Song," and finally the accompaniment of Orlofsky's toast, in the form of a cadenza played by Mr. Korngold on the piano, in waltz rhythm, without melody, to accentuate the spoken text.

As a conductor he was energetic, rhythmical, authoritative, but heavy handed and often too noisy for the singers, who were prevailingly indistinct with their text. But this is a fine, gay show, which no doubt will tighten up as the performance is repeated. There was unmistakable evidence of the public's satisfaction, which was good to see. "Chacun à son gout!"

"Little Darling"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
October 28, 1942

Karen Morley and Leon Ames Star in Comedy of Trouble Between the Sexes

By JOHN ANDERSON

FURTHER trouble between the sexes and the older and younger generations, broke out amiably at the Biltmore last night in Eric Hatch's new comedy, "Little Darling," and though Tom Weatherly has provided an excellent cast for it, and the second act bubbles into some effervescent fun, it isn't enough to last the evening out.

Mr. Hatch plainly has a gift for capricious situations and goofy humor, which should prove valuable when he knows more about putting his framework together. As it is his plot runs out before the final curtain, the dialogue filibusters to keep things going, and the comedy becomes repetitious and threadbare.

But he is doing fine in the middle session when, after working up a good first act lather, he lets the bristles fly. It is then that an erring father comes home to his irate daughter, a junior miss, and tries to explain away his waywardness.

Tardy Wild Oat

Cynthia Brown is willing to forgive her parent's tardy wild oat; she is even willing to overlook the fact that he, a prosperous vendor of literary tripe, has written a wicked and therefore successful play called "Old Letch." What Cynthia cannot forgive is that in dashing out of his staid middle age in quest of his youth, her old man has picked up Cynthia's roommate at school, one Alice Bushfelter, as his partner in mischief, and gone, as they say, to town.

In this Miss Bushfelter, Mr. Hatch has created an amusing character whose very name makes the susceptible Chinese house boy break down with laughter. Miss Bushfeiter not only thinks that "Old Letch" is "too Heaven," but verges on idolatry in believing Kenneth Brown a cutey-pants. When she and her ageing playboy return to his Connecticut home to confront the outraged Cynthia, Mr. Hatch hits his high spots.

The arrival of Miss Bushfelter's indignant fiance, a stuffy youth too righteous for anything, provides a reasonable ending, but not a very inventive one. I have a suspicion, however, that some of the performances and even Mr. deLiagre's direction do not capture exactly the quality the author had in mind—a quality most readily identified as pure balminess. I have a suspicion that they have taken Mr. Hatch a little too seriously when some of the material is plainly as cracked as a gourd, and so intended.

There is, for instance, the grandfather's clock which is almost my favorite character in the play. Its hands never move, it has nary a tick, nor a tock, but every now and then it lets fly with two strikes, and then a third that is as crazily hilarious as it is discordant. Now, a family with a clock like that is in training to be a Thurber household, or I miss my guess. The next step is seals in the bedroom.

Also I would point to the further evidence that when the repentant Mr. Brown decides to get plastered with the Chinese houseboy over a little "orgy-water" they begin singing "Belly Me Not On the Lone Plailee" in deference to the Oriental disaffection for the letter "R."

This, of course, is what might have happened if "Junior Miss" had got mixed up with "The Male Animal," but the writing doesn't sustain the mood, and the performance doesn't steadily reinforce it. Phyllis Avery manages it perfectly as the balmy Miss Bushfelter in a performance that is immensely funny.

Cockeyed Emphasis

In the part of the wayward father, rather too explicitly written, Leon Ames gets the cockeyed emphasis when it is there to be found, and Arthur Franz makes the most of a Yale man whose mental operations are so slow as to be practically motionless. Barbara Bel Geddes, as the righteous Cynthia, keeps a superb poise and a straight face through it all, and Karen Morley beautifies a situation that doesn't give her a chance for much else.

They were all on the edge of a comedy which I devoutly hope will be Mr. Hatch's next.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 28, 1942

Up It Goes, Down It Comes

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE quieter adjectives will take care of *Little Darling*, one of those pleasantly harmless comedies that start slightly below sea level, rise gradually to a second-act hilltop of fun, and then wind gently down to where they started. Despite a winking pretense of sophistication, the whole thing is thoroughly innocent and almost passionately cute. It nicely fills the bill for a young people's Christmas theater party, but for older folk on a chill October evening its laughs can't keep pace with its length.

One reason for this, I suppose, is that by the middle of the first act you can size up everything that is going to happen right down to the final curtain, and with the plot an open secret, everything depends on the laughs that Mr. Hatch can squeeze out of individual scenes or cram into the dialogue. Since the plot is scarcely more robust than it is mysterious, Mr. Hatch's job is a pretty sizable one, and it is no wonder that he is all pegged out by the second-act curtain.

Little Darling tells of a recalcitrant young lady who lives in Connecticut with her father, a magazine writer, whom she dislikes and considers stuffy. Ordinary tactics having failed, he desperately decides to prove his charm and worldliness by flirting with her former room-mate, who arrives for a visit. The room-mate being all too full of precocious yearnings, papa is soon up to his neck in romance. The problem is to get him out, return the room-mate to her Milwaukee beau, and restore father to his attractive and not so flighty secretary: all of which is done in a much too perfunctory way.

Mr. Hatch has worked in some laughs but, badgered by his meager plot, too often has tried to get two, three or even six laughs out of the same joke. The one about the room-mate's name, for instance, which is Bushfelter. Or a whinnying Chinese servant. Or an eccentric clock. He also has pounded away at situations which are silly to begin with and badly missed fire with Miss Bushfelter's home town beau, who is merely a dull and noisy oaf.

Mr. de Liagre has helped with some brisk direction, and the cast for the most part is pleasant. Leon Ames makes a suitably harassed father and swain. Karen Morley is likeable as the secretary, and Phyllis Avery makes a very attractive Miss Bushfelter. As the troublesome but tractable daughter, Barbara Bel Geddes plays with a great deal of liveliness and spirit. One can only wish that the play showed an equal amount.

NEW YORK POST
October 28, 1942

Leon Ames and Karen Morley Are Stars

By EARL WILSON
(Pinch-Hitting for Wilella Waldorf)

WHEN Leon Ames strode in from the driveway, preceded by a blond seductress; with a wiggle, and announced, "My bag's in the car," there was only one remark that the young actor named Arthur Franz could properly offer. So he offered it. Looking the blonde up and down—and around—he replied, "The hell she is!"

Being strictly a sucker for gags like that, this observer felt that "Little Darling"—presented last night at the Biltmore Theatre by Tom Weatherly—was thoroughly enjoyable. God forgive resorting to such a weak feminine appraisal, but the exact term for it seemed to be "cute."

This bright new comedy of course has no Message but it has shapely, attractive Barbara Bel Geddes, whom we much prefer to Messages anyway.

Papa Has an Orgy

Barbara gets her old man into a hell of a rassle with Sex that lasts for three acts. She's cast as the daughter of Leon Ames. He plays an amiable author who writes goo for the Ladies' Home Companion and tries to be a model father. But his daughter hates him and he despairs. A widower, he secretly wants to have Orgies. He seems to have studied up on Orgies by secretly writing a play, "Oh, Lech!" (from Lecherous), which has all its scenes laid in a bedroom.

Now it would be perfectly simple for him to have an Orgy with his pretty and devoted secretary, played smoothly and skillfully by Karen Morley, but that never occurs to him. So he waits until his daughter's blond college room-mate (Phillis Avery) comes waggling in. Her name's Alice Bushfelter—Bushy for short. They have a champagne Orgy right on the davenport. Barbara comes in and finds them drunk and asleep.

"Bushy!" screams daughter Barbara. "How could you?"

While His Secretary Waits

Well, the way Playwright Eric Hatch has written it, Bushy has merely started. She and her best friend's father go night-clubbing and love-making and his bedroom play becomes "the season's wickedest wow." When Bushy and Papa come home after helling around in El Morocco, Barbara flings out the word "concubine."

"You're so jealous you could spit!" Bushy coldly replies, adding that her middle-aged boy friend is an old cutiepants. Barbara and her own true love (Arthur Franz) start making plans to break it up but this is complicated when Arthur says, "To hell with your plans—let's neck."

Nevertheless, ingenious Barbara brings in Bushy's youthful boy friend from Milwaukee to prevent her father from marrying Bushy—and we leave you to guess what high honor then falls on Karen Morley, Cutiepants' secretary, who has been waiting for him through three acts of hell.

Leon Ames' slow-voiced distress and his warming stage personality stand out in this production which was directed by Alfred de Liagre Jr., but the performances of the youngsters—Miss Geddes, Miss Avery, Arthur Franz and Erik Martin—are almost as excellent. A nosegay, too, for Peter Goo Chong, who played the Oriental houseboy. When he and Leon Ames sang, "Then belly me deep on the lone plailee," everything seemed to be perfectly perfect at the Biltmore.

"Little Darling"

NEW YORK TIMES
October 28, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Little Darling"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN CASE you want to see a middle-aged author philandering with his daughter's school room-mate, "Little Darling," which was put on at the Biltmore last evening, is undoubtedly your dish. Eric Hatch, a script-writer, author of "Five Days" and "Unexpected Uncle," thought up this one in a houseboat; and Tom Weatherly, man-about-Broadway, has produced it with a gilt-edge setting by Watson Barratt that represents bookcases, fireplace, divan and stairway leading to the second floor.

There is a Chinese houseboy who says "hello, bossy," "hello, missy" or "O, Hell" every time he galumphs through the room, and some of the younger set astonish their elders with double talk and other extravagant ways. In the first scene, the secretary of the middle-aged author speaks to him silently with eyes that are full of tenderness. "O, helly, bossy," as the Chinese houseboy doubtless would say.

* * *

If it is romantic to see a loyal secretary eating out her heart for a big chump of a boss and if it is hilarious to see a father weaving his way through gin mills with his daughter's room-mate from finishing school, Mr. Hatch is a creative artist with a fine sense of revelry. Your enjoyment of "Little Darling" depends upon your admiration for the original premises. For all the rest follows in the same key—the risque drama written on the quiet by the author of stuffier stories, the success of the drama despite the critics' just estimation of its worth, the belittling references to the provinciality of Milwaukee, the arrival of a belligerent suitor from Milwaukee and the local police and the final victory of the wholesome secretary with the love-light in her eyes. Mr. Hatch keeps a lot of old hats on his houseboat.

* * *

Either he or Leon Ames, who plays the part, feels romantic about authors. For this one opens the play in slacks and sports coat, germinating an idea in the living room with a conspicuous pipe supplied free by Custom-Bilt. Mr. Ames is an affable actor who happens to find himself up to his neck in a part that keeps snapping at him. Karen Morley plays the brave-hearted secretary with slender yearning that would be irresistible to any one but an actor under orders from a playwright. As the sweetheart of a literary prodigate, Phyllis Avery is giving an agreeable performance.

But the only lasting pleasure "Little Darling" has given this column is the presence of Barbara Bel Geddes as the daughter. Since her plump debut in "Out of the Frying Pan" two seasons ago Miss Geddes has become an enchanting creature of less rotundity and greater charm. She has an uncommonly pleasant voice. In addition to that, she is an actress. Whatever you may think of "Little Darling" in other respects, Miss Geddes is in the best of taste.

'LITTLE DARLING'

A comedy in three acts by Eric Hatch; directed by Alfred de Liagre, Jr., setting by Watson Barratt; presented at the Biltmore Theater on October 27, 1942, by Tom Weatherly. The cast:

Katherine Wilson	Karen Morley
Wong	Peter Goo Chong
Kenneth Brown	Leon Ames
Cynthia Brown	Barbara Bel Geddes
Teddy Graves	Arthur Franz
Dr. Jarvis	Gerald Cornell
Alice Bushfelter	Phyllis Avery
Sully Peters	James J. Coyle
Ralph Pabst	Erik Martin
Danny	Dick Landsman

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 28, 1942

'Little Darling' a Hollywood Comedy About A Flighty Author

"Little Darling," comedy by Eric Hatch. Produced by Tom Weatherly at the Biltmore Theatre, New York, Oct. 27, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

ERIC HATCH, the scenarist who wrote "Little Darling," a new comedy at the Biltmore, would have us believe that his fairly amusing little play was really inspired by a backward author living up Connecticut way with Westbrook Pegler and Lowell Thomas.

But he can't fool us. His writing man hero, who pretends to be a heller on the loose, never got any closer to Connecticut than Beverly Hills, California, and there he stuck.

Which is to say that the mood and pattern of Mr. Hatch's comedy are definitely Hollywood. Including a laughing Chinese boy servant, a bungalow setting and the general confusion of a disappointed writing person's frustrations.

Curiously most Hollywood comedies do have to do with writing men and their vicarious devilries. You may recall that there was a series of them two seasons ago, and no one of them was half as successful in the playing as it was in the reading.

Well Furnished

There is one nice thing about them, however: They are always attractively cast and produced. "Little Darling" is no exception to this rule. The generous Warner Bros., the accredited sponsors, have seen their darling well bestowed.

The company includes three attractive young women: Karen Morley, a dependable romantic; Barbara Bel Geddes, become slim and lovely, and a splendidly poised actress since her first flier in "Out of the Frying Pan," and Phyllis Avery, who was one of the ingenue adorables of "Letters to Lucerne."

The men include Leon Ames, a gentle fellow who has contributed several good stage characterizations to the Broadway theatre, notably in "The Male Animal" and "Guest in the House," and a couple of enthused juveniles, Erik Martin and Arthur Franz, also from the West.

Daughter's Fault

"Little Darling" really belongs in the "Junior Miss," "Janie," group. Cynthia Brown, come to live with her father when her mother, from whom he had been separated, dies, is disgusted with the stodgy male parent she has acquired.

This would be in line with the conditioning Cynthia had undergone while living with her mother. It occurs to father, who is a writer for women's magazines, that if he were to have a fling and make it public enough Cynthia might approve of him.

At which point Mr. Hatch's comedy becomes labored. Papa takes on his daughter's 17-year-old room-mate as a willing co-conspirator, haunts the night spots, gets a production for the hot farce he has written on the sly and is a changed man.

It takes a third act to get him straightened out, and the straightening processes produce pretty weak entertainment. An occasional snappy line is all that saves it.

Watson Barratt did the bungalow interior, which is as fresh as seasoned pine. Alfred de Liagre did the directing, which keeps the cast in character and the action as natural as the author permitted. The first audience seemed happy.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 28, 1942

The Little Darling Opens at the Biltmore

By BURTON RASCOE

ONE wonders who, in these times, puts up the dough to produce such a doodad as The Little Darling, which opened at the Biltmore last night, and why. It is like something cooked up by the bright boy in junior high (you know: the one whose picture in the annual is tagged, "Look to your laurels, Noel Coward") for the more exhibitionary members of the graduating class.

Unfortunately (and, indeed, amazingly) the performers seemed to have been coached by some irrepressible in junior high also. You have seen Leon Ames, Karen Morley and Peter Goo Chong in the movies or on the stage, or both, and you never saw them act like that before. Gerald Cornell, whom you have doubtless also seen, has so small a bit that the director didn't notice he was in the cast, and hence didn't mess up his part. The lovely Barbara Bel Geddes was, I suspect, coached by her illustrious father, Norman Bel Geddes; for, whenever her lines gave her any chance at all, she was entirely natural and believable. (When Norman coaches it's a production.) Otherwise, a more amateurish show, in all respects, has rarely been seen on Broadway.

* * *

The author is Eric Hatch, a St. Paul's School product, who gave up investment banking in 1928, after a mild novelistic success with A Couple of Quick Ones (the substance and manner of which may be judged by the title) and from then on found favor with some editors of the slicks with road-company New Yorker fiction until he produced a genuinely amusing tidbit called My Man Godfrey, which was promptly grabbed by the movies—along with Mr. Hatch himself—with good returns at the box office. Since then Mr. Hatch has had a following in light fiction of the kind that sparkles with the sort of wit that boys now somewhere in arms used to chalk up on their flivvers—the crackling kind that strains at the double entendre.

The mistake of last night possibly was something Mr. Hatch originally wrote as a movie scenario which was turned down as likely to draw frowns from the Hays office; whereupon (and again I merely conjecture) Mr. Hatch refused to compromise his artistic integrity and recast the scenario as a play. It has to do with a widower author of romantic fiction who in middle-age is forced, more or less, into jazzing himself up by the jibes of his secretary and his daughter at his settled ways of life. He goes in search of his youth with his daughter's roommate at college, thereby arousing the possessive instincts in both daughter and secretary. There are numerous gag lines, some of which produced laughs and some of which merely gagged.

* * *

I can imagine that some of the regular Hatch fiction followers might imagine they are reading him while watching the play and enjoy themselves, but to adults The Little Darling is about as funny as a zoot-suit. I am sure that Peter Goo Chong is ashamed of the silly caricature of his race in the part he has to play as the author's butler—and the way he is called upon to play it.